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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

No. 48 TORONTO February, 1945

A NEW MURAL OF ANCIENT EGYPT

The Egyptians of 1400 B.C. decorated the walls of their tombs with gaily coloured pictures of daily life and industry. These paintings had a religious purpose, the perpetuation of life after death, but they give us a detailed and accurate knowledge of their times. They are more informative than our own graphic art, when once their strange technique and conventions are mastered. They are, moreover, supreme examples of mural art.

In designing a mural for one of the Egyptian galleries, Miss Winifred Needler, of the Royal Ontario Museum, has followed these ancient tomb pictures with as little alteration as possible. Her pictorial composition includes scenes illustrating agriculture, wood and metal working, brick-making, spinning and weaving, vintage, kitchen art and domestic life. A continuous band of elaborate ornamental hieroglyphs labels these scenes in the ancient Egyptian language. A panel below carries corresponding English labels which help the visitor to understand the pictures. This lettering is decorated with borders illustrating Egyptian ornamental motifs. The mural as a whole fulfils a triple purpose: it is decorative, entertaining, and instructive.

MUSEUM COUNTERACTS ISOLATIONISM

World-mindedness is one of the big lessons taught in the Royal Ontario Museum. An understanding of the culture and aspirations of men of different creeds and colours from other lands promotes sympathy. A glimpse of foreign animals and minerals reveals the relationship of one's own country to other lands.

HUNTER DISCOVERS RARE "SNOW BUG"

A hunter, in quest of a wary rabbit, came upon a startling discovery. He found a number of small, long-legged insects walking over the snow. At first he thought them to be animated particles of wood, but on closer examination, he found that they possessed six legs, a body and a small head. He placed a few of them in a piece of paper and stuffed them into the pocket of his hunting jacket.

The following day he brought the insects to the Royal Ontario Museum. Here he learned, from the insect specialists, that he had found a rather rare kind of crane-fly and that little is known about the life history of this cold-loving insect. They appear as wingless, adult flies in the coldest months of the year, but what happens to them when the warmer weather arrives no one seems to know. Incidentally, the insects were dead by the time they reached the Museum. Apparently this peculiar little "snow bug" just can't tolerate heat.

MUSEUM HOURS

When in Toronto you will find the Museum open free from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, and from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays. War conditions make it necessary to close the building on Monday. A 15 cent admission charge is made on Wednesday and Friday.

FOX STAGES COME-BACK

Ontario is being invaded, quietly and unobtrusively, by an animal known as the gray fox. Before the coming of the white man, the gray fox was a common animal in southern Ontario. This we know from the bones found in prehistoric Indian village sites. Then it disappeared from our area. Its range shrank southward, for reasons unknown. It has been absent from early historic times until recently.

Twenty years ago the gray fox population began to spread northward again. The Royal Ontario Museum received its first specimen in 1942. Subsequently others were secured and the front of the invasion is now known to be from the St. Lawrence to Lake-of-the-Woods. Only time will tell how successful this animal will be in re-establishing itself in Ontario.

The coat of the gray fox has a "salt and pepper" colour effect and the tip of its tail is black. These features will distinguish it from the red fox in any of its phases. The Museum will appreciate information which will add to our knowledge of the gray fox in Ontario.

ONTARIO HAS VALUABLE CORAL REEF

You needn't go to the south seas to inspect a coral reef. There's an ancient one in the sea-made rocks north of Lake Erie, near Hagersville, Ontario.

The collections of fossil corals in the Royal Ontario Museum testify to the fact that coral reefs and islands are not confined to our present day and age. In the prehistoric seas that flooded the continents from time to time, corals flourished in great variety. Their fossilized remains are found in all latitudes from Arctic to Antarctic. If ancient corals lived in warm waters, as their descendants do to-day, we might assume that polar seas were at one time like our present tropical waters.

The Hagersville fossil corals lived over 300 million years ago. With the passage of time their limy skeletons often became cemented together in great masses. These accumulations are powerful agents in building up limestone beds. Coralline limestones have many important uses in our present day economy, such as building stone, and road fillers. Thus the lowly creatures known as corals have done their bit, not only in shaping the globe, but in shaping our modern civilization.

BIRD MIGRATION BEGINS

Although it is still February, migratory birds are on the move. Don't assume that this means an early spring. According to ornithologists of the Royal Ontario Museum, bird migration commences at this time of year, every year.

February is the month when Snow Buntings and Horned Larks, birds which have sojourned in the United States, re-enter our province. Toward the end of the month scattered bands of crows also can be expected to wing their way over our southern counties. Far to the south, in South America, many kinds of birds are becoming restive. Shorebirds of several kinds which will nest within the Arctic circle are already on the move northward. Cheer up, maybe spring is just around the corner.